

COINS

Tiny mint marks lead to giant gripe

This week's column answers more questions from Tribune readers.

Q—I have one major gripe regarding U.S. coins. The mint marks are so small it's like trying to read the baseball box scores. Can't the government feature larger mint marks? There's plenty of space on the coins.—L.S., Dolton

A—Just two years ago, Treasury Department engravers redesigned the "D" and "S" mint marks, making each more distinct. It may be several more years before government leaders authorize another change.

You should write to the mint director designate, Mrs. Donna Pope [Bureau of the Mint, Department of the Treasury, Washington, D.C. 20220]. But don't expect miracles.

By the way, mint-mark usage started centuries ago, partly as a way to publicize the location of official mints. Although the marks have little practical value today, many countries still use them.

Q—I'm told that the letters "JS"

appear on every Roosevelt dime, and that they are the initials of Joseph Stalin of Russia. Is this true? I've looked, but can't find them.—A.S., Chicago

A—The JS initials are on the dime next to the date, but you'll need a magnifying glass to see them clearly. Contrary to popular belief, they aren't Stalin's initials, but belong to John Sinnock, the coin's designer.

Q—in response to a 1979 newspaper ad, we bought several Russian 5-ruble coins commemorating the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. Has our hoard gone up much in value since the games?—J.K., Oak Forest

No. The Russian government produced more than 30 types of Olympic coins and sold them in several countries, including the United States. The big sales campaigns tended to saturate the market. Each of your pieces contains a half-ounce of silver and retails for about \$15, according to catalogs.

Q—With Susan B. Anthony dollars fading into obscurity, I'm curious to know if any woman has appeared on a piece of U.S. paper money.—V.A., Oak Park

A—Yes, a few have. Martha Washington's portrait adorns silver certificate \$1 bills printed in the late 1800s, and a \$20 bill from the 1870s depicts a painting that shows the baptism of Pocahontas, a 17th-Century Indian.